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MOTION PICTURES IN TEACHER EDUCATION--IDEAS AND APPLICATIONS IN LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION.

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SOUND MOTION PICTURES, CAREFULLY DEVELOPED AND COORDINATED BY LANGUAGE TEACHERS USING THE INFORMATION FROM SUCH LANGUAGE-RELATED DISCIPLINES AS PHILOSOPHY, LITERATURE, PSYCHOLOGY, LINGUISTICS, AND CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY, COULD BE USED EFFECTIVELY IN BOTH LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION AND TEACHER EDUCATION. AFTER AN AVERAGE ACADEMIC THREE-YEAR COURSE IN WHICH THE SUCCESSIVE STEPS TO MASTERING THE LANGUAGE CODE (THE SOUNDS OF LANGUAGE) HAD TAKEN THE LEARNER TO THE POINT OF RECOGNIZED LANGUAGE COMPETENCE, THE SOUND FILM COULD COMPLEMENT INSTRUCTION BY ESTABLISHING APPROPRIATE MEANING TO ACCOMPANY THE LEARNING CODE WITHOUT MAKING IT TRIVIAL OR CONFUSING IT IN THE PROCESS. AT THAT LEVEL, FILMS MIGHT GIVE THE LEARNER AN OPPORTUNITY TO PRACTICE HIS ACQUIRED SKILLS AND MIGHT PRESENT THE LANGUAGE TO HIM IN CULTURAL CONTEXT. IN TEACHER TRAINING, EITHER STAGED OR "LIVE" FILMS THAT HONESTLY DOCUMENTED CLASSROOM PROCEDURES OR EVENTS MIGHT CONTRIBUTE REAL INSIGHT TO LANGUAGE TEACHING TECHNIQUES AND PROBLEMS AND BE IDEAL INSTRUCTIONAL VEHICLES. THIS SPEECH WAS DELIVERED AT TEACHERS COLLEGE, COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY, JUNE 14, 1966. (AB)

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MOTION PICTURES IN TEACHER EDUCATION: Ideas and Applications in Language Instruction

by Nelson Brooks
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[A talk given at Teachers College, Columbia University, June 14, 1966]

Before we recommend an instrument for use in teacher training, we need to be specific about what the instrument is and what the teachers are being trained for. We need to be precise about what the teacher does in that subject of instruction. As you will have noticed, our topic is very broad, though the subtitle narrows it down to something reasonably within the knowledge of your speaker. For our present purpose, the instrument is the sound motion picture and the teachers in question are being trained for instruction in a modern foreign language--a subject in which the teacher's role is both similar to and different from that of teachers in other areas of the curriculum.

If we are to talk about pictures, we shall have to talk about light. If we are to talk about language, we shall have to talk about sound. And as we talk about pictures and language, we should place them in that whole spectrum of symbolic transformations which includes music, mathematics, and ritual, among others, and of which pictures and language are such important areas. And again, if we are to talk about teachers, we must talk about learning, and about the teacher's all-important role in helping learning to occur.

I propose to treat our topic under six different headings, as follows:

1) Learning and knowing.
2) The five senses.
3) The physics and the psychology of light and sound.
4) The nature of language.
5) The sound motion picture in the foreign language course.
6) The sound motion picture in teacher training.

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How do we learn? How do we know what we know? These are ancient, incessant problems and of course we cannot give satisfactory answers. But these questions must be in our minds if we are to do anything at all with our topic. We are constantly learning while we are awake, even though what we learn may be utterly trivial. The daily newspaper is filled--or purports to be--with what we did not know before. Learning can be compared to the tidewater area that separates the sea from the land. It is a sloping, marginal region that divides non-knowing from knowing. Sometimes this area is very narrow and can be crossed in a second or so, as it is when we learn, for example, the score of yesterday's ball game. Again, it can be miles in width and be very difficult to traverse, as it is when we are learning how to play a musical instrument or to communicate in a language other than our own. Many hundreds of hours of very concentrated effort are then required to go from non-knowing to knowing. One thinks of the immense tidal flats that lie to the west of M. Saint Michel in Normandy, upon which one does not dare venture without a guide.

Our professional use of the word learning refers usually to formal learning in what we call the classroom situation--a brand of learning of immense importance. This importance is recognized by all of us here, though this is by no means universally true in our culture, as the percentage of our national income that is devoted to education rather soberly indicates. As for the word knowing, for the sake of argument, let me hazard the statement that we know what we know by three different means, one, by perception, that is, through data received by the senses, two, by instinct, that is, through genes and chromosomes received from our parents, and three, by intuition, that is, by piecing together bits and parts of the residue laid down in our cerebral cortex by the first two processes. This is not a scientific statement, merely a poetic one. But perhaps worthy of consideration even so.

Whatever we may think about the role of instinct and intuition in knowing, we can all agree on perception. Let us speak about it in some detail. Talk about perception brings with it talk about cognition, and happily so, for one of the great events of scientific psychology in our century has been the rediscovery of cognition. When I was in college, forty years ago, in the heyday of John B. Watson and behaviorism, the stimulus produced the response, and that was that.

You went from S to R and no nonsense. Nowadays, a small 'c' is inserted between S and R, opening up a world of possibilities for the student of language learning. For that little 'c' stands for cognition, which the dictionary defines as "that activity of the mind which receives sense impressions and elaborates concepts from them." A concept is defined as "an idea generalized from particular instances." It is perception that lets us observe a dinner napkin, a snowball, a lump of sugar, an Easter lily, and recognize each for what it is. But it is cognition that lets us extract from them a universal quality, whiteness, which all these possess, and lets us deal internally with that quality and give it a name, whiteness. It is perception that lets us touch an ice cube, a dog's nose, a trout stream, a cellar wall, and again recognize each for what it is, yet it is cognition that permits us to extract from them a common quality of coolness and another of wetness, to give them names, and to recognize these qualities or universals when we encounter them again in other objects.

It is easy to conclude that pictures can represent particulars, the napkin, the snowball, the ice cube, the trout stream, in a very satisfactory way. On the other hand, the universals, whiteness, coolness, wetness, are far better represented by words. Whoever it was who first said:"A picture is worth a thousand words" forgot to add:"If we are seeking to particularize." But, just as often, we are seeking to generalize. For passport identification, a picture is probably better than any number of words. But if we wish to refer to those inhabitants of this city who support its government by giving up a sizeable part of their yearly income in taxes, the single word "taxpayer" is surely better than a thousand pictures. Our understanding of the difference between talk and pictures, that is, between discuYsive and presentational forms, begins here. For it is the tendency of pictures to particularize and of talk to generalize.

The role of perception in learning and knowing is of course maximal, and the appeal of the talking picture is very great, with all its promise of selection, concentration, and control over what the learner will see and hear. Does the talking picture live up to this promise in the learning of a new language? Our answer will be conditioned by our definition of language and the differences we can find between seeing and hearing.

Further comment on perception brings us to the second item on our list, the five senses. The range of sight is practically limitless. With the eye we can easily travel to the moon, the sun, the stars, even to neighboring galaxies. We all know how deprived is the person who does not have at his disposal the sense of sight. The sense of hearing is far more limited, for sound, as perceived by the senses, travels only through the sea of air in which we live. It travels slowly and not very far. We can see our neighbor a half-mile away, but we cannot hear him. The third sense, odor, requires the transfer through the air of odor-bearing particles to our noses, though the point of origin may be at some distance from us. Touch requires close physical contact with the object in question, sensitivity to touch being spread over all parts of our bodies. The sense of taste is the most intimate of all, for what is to be tasted must actually be taken into our mouths. Through perception and cognition we learn by means of our senses to know with what we are surrounded. Often more than one sense is involved in knowing an object. A glass of ginger ale, for example, has a message for all five.

The term 'audio-visual', now apparently about three decades old, underscores the importance of sight and hearing in the processes of learning and knowing. I suppose a really thorough-going term would be 'audio-visual-olefactory-tactile-gustatory.' (And don't think such aids may not be on the market before long) The word 'audio-visual' is not meant to slight the other senses, it merely indicates the great predominance of these two. The term 'audio-visual' and the talking picture came into being at about the same time. With perhaps more enthusiasm than discrimination, audio and visual have been used together very extensively, almost as if they were inseparable. Sometimes they have been asked to carry nearly the whole burden of instruction.

But nothing is the answer to everything, and a closer analysis of the phenomenon of language has revealed vast critical areas in which sound is totally independent of sight, and has made us rather startlingly aware of what the eye can do and cannot do, as well as of what the ear can do and cannot do. In order to understand in what profoundly different ways pictures and sounds bring information to the mind, we must consider the third item in our list, the physics and psychology of light and sound.

The unit of light is a photon, a tiny bundle of energy released as an electron shifts from one orbit to another in its race around the nucleus of an atom. Photons travel in enormous quantities and faster than anything else we know of. A brief glance at a scene or a picture of a scene gives us a great deal of information about it in an incredibly short time. The mechanism of the eye permits us to receive a message by means of light about the dimensions, color, and relative position of a great many objects, all in less than a second. To do this, however, our eyes must be directed the right way. If we turn our heads or close our eyelids, the message is cut off.

Sound comes to us in a very different manner. The air that touches our ears is set in motion by whatever makes the sound in a way not unlike the dropping of a pebble into a pool of water. Sound continues to reach us no matter what the position of our bodies, and we cannot shut off our ears as we can our eyes. The ear is very able in distinguishing between degrees of volume and qualities of sound. But a word message that is to be borne by sound takes much longer to convey and is often far less precise than a message borne by a picture. We should note in passing that the body can receive sound and also emit it. The human body does not emit light, though other living creatures do so. No doubt the whole story of communication would be far different if we were as gifted as the fireflies.

A fuller exploration of the differences between presentational and discursive forms (that is, between pictures and language) is not permitted us in this discussion. But the blunt truth is that we shall never understand talking pictures, and far less their role in education, until we take the time, muster the patience, and acquire the mind-set to make such explorations.

Of course a word message falsifies reality. No one thinks that a door is anything like the consonant and vowel sounds we use to represent it. Pictures falsify reality too. Nobody really thinks that the pack of cigarettes or the beer bottle that we see pictured in a magazine advertisement is actually paper-thin. And there is a double falsity in the motion picture, for, as we know, what is flashed on the screen is not motion at all, but a rapid succession of still pictures. The eye mechanism being what it is, we interpret these

successive pictures as showing what in fact they do not show: motion. This is a good example of the relationship between perception and reality.

We must go on now to talk about language and the part it plays in the sound motion picture. Again, we must be precise in the meaning of our terms. By language we mean not the language of the bees or the language of the flowers, but the language of human discourse as produced by human lips and received by human ears. Language in this sense is a highly complex fabric of systems of sound, of form, of order and relationship, and of items of potential meaning. It is a behavior pattern typical of every living human being that has reached the age of three or four, although anything remotely comparable to it is totally denied every other living creature. Language is often accompanied by activities of the eye and the facial muscles, and by body movements of many kinds. Ingenious ways of picturing the sounds of language were invented a few thousand years ago, and have mightily transformed the entire human predicament. But a thorough knowledge of the true nature of language is denied us until we can perceive that, in the last analysis, all human language is reducible to what the lips can say and the ears can hear. This is a sweeping, indeed shattering, admission, one that the intellectual world is as yet hardly ready to make.

Different languages can come into contact geographically, socially, and often in the same individual. Instruction in a second language is a deliberate attempt to encourage this latter kind of contact. Whether the two languages in question are to be separate households, dwelling under the same roof but independently and collaborating only occasionally one with the other, or whether the new language is to be adopted into the midst of the existing mother-tongue family as a minor, restricted, and dominated member of it, is still--strangely enough--a moot professional point. This question raises its tousled psycholinguistic head in the foreign language film that has English titles. For students of the foreign language this produces a mental hodgepodge of a most disconcerting kind, and it takes no profound insight into normal language behavior to see why. Of course the observer wants most of all to understand the story. Trying to do this in two languages interferes with understanding and often blocks it off. Any good that this may do the student of the foreign language is very hard to discern; the harm is all too evident.

We must not leave our discussion of the nature of language without remarking upon its division into two major areas or streams, each parallelling the other when language is in action. We call these two areas 'code' and 'meaning'. Code comprises the sounds of the language, the forms and shapes that the word elements take, the patterns of order and relationship in which they follow each other in the stream of speech, and the word elements considered as bearers of meaning. Meaning is related to sound, form, order, and lexical choice at every point. The speaker puts meaning into the elements of code as he produces language and the hearer extracts meaning from the code as he listens. Now pictures can be extremely useful in illustrating meaning and making it precise. But the learner must learn not only meaning; he must learn the code as well if he is to communicate in it. Yet these are matters that cannot be pictured. We can easily depict the difference between a boat and a boot or a key and a ski, but to try to picture the production of the sounds that make this difference in speech is well-nigh impossible. We might as well try to teach a musician suppleness of the wrist or quality of tone through pictures. In summary, we may almost say: pictures for learning the meaning of language, yes; pictures for learning the code of language, no.

Language learning is in many respects like learning music, for it involves the training of both muscle and mind in new and complicated ways. One radical difference, however, distinguishes language from music. Music is indeed individual behavior, with the musician performing solo or in unison or accord with one or several others. Language behavior, in its essence, is not individual behavior at all, but is a "dancing couple" or "boxing match" kind of behavior that seems to be best called dyadic. Participants in language interchange are not relating what they do to a pre-arranged background pattern in a given rhythm and a given key. Instead, each is guiding his activity by what the other does, has done, or is about to do, and by that only. The psychologists have not discovered this fact about language as yet, but some day they will. And when they do, they will be vastly more helpful to us in language teaching than they have been up to now.

After this discussion of theoretical matters, we turn now to the fifth item on our list, and make some practical suggestions about the use of sound motion pictures in a foreign language course, relating them as best we can to the principles we have proposed. To begin with, the language course must be set up first.

To start out by taking a sequence of motion pictures, no matter how fine they may be as such, or by diligently seeking out films already made, then attempting to build a language course around these presentations for the eye comes about as close to doing things upside down and backward as could possibly be. The successive steps to be followed in mastering the language code must be identified and arranged in order first, through an entire course that takes the learner to a point of recognized language competence. This is a length of time running, on the average, to three academic years at least. Only after these preparations have been made should we turn to pictures to complement this material in establishing appropriate meaning to accompany code. Proceeding in this way, we may hope for a cultural authenticity and a psychological aptness in the learning of meaning that will neither trivialize nor complicate and confuse the learning of code.

Secondly, we shall understand the function of the sound motion picture better if we distinguish between learning and performance. Once a given section or sections of code have been learned, the motion picture as well as the tape recorder can be used to supplement the live voice in giving the learner an opportunity to practice with what he has acquired. But in doing this we must be sure that the profile of sound is full and clear, and above all that it is not masked and clouded by the abomination of incidental music. Thirdly, there are added dimensions of meaning that develop with the use of language appropriate to persons who are relating in a normal way to each other and to the cultural situation in which they are. Such scenes can be presented in a uniquely effective way with sound motion pictures, provided, of course, that the basic elements of code have been learned first. Although the motion picture cannot engage the student in the dyadic of language (it doesn't have the necessary blood chemistry) it can, if rightly prepared, provide models of unique value to the learner.

As the student passes through the sequence of phases that bring him to a point of language competence, he of course has need of the most carefully prepared materials. It is now recognized that these can be prepared only through the coordinated efforts of language teachers, aided by the best advice and counsel obtainable from a number of adjacent disciplines in which language plays an important role. These are, especially, philosophy, ~~literature,~~ psychology, linguistics, and cultural anthropology. The sound motion picture can well become, with the collaboration of able motion picture production personnel, an integral part of such materials. It goes without saying that in pictures of this kind, the learning of language and of

meaning must take precedence over what is theatrical, amusing, unusual, or quaint. With proper planning, documentary films can find their way into what we are discussing, provided they are honest documentaries- giving) a true report of life as it is, and are not falsified or 'storified'.

We arrive now at the sixth and last item on our list, the use of the sound motion picture in teacher training. The films that can contribute most to the preparation of teachers are those that show the teacher in the act of teaching. Ideally, we would hope for films showing the teacher teaching the different skills, the varieties of sentence structure, the shaping and correction of pronunciation, the development of vocabulary, the creation and writing down of sentences and paragraphs, the giving of quizzes and tests. We would like to see the same teacher teaching the same class at different levels, teaching in big classes and in small, teaching students of greater and lesser potential as language learners, teaching students in college-bound courses and those not intending to go beyond the high school, teaching pupils in the fourth grade and in the twelfth. We would like to see films showing classroom dynamics and the varieties of activity possible in any language class, the teaching of word study, the use of the questionnaire, the use of literary texts in classes in which language learning is the dominant purpose. We would like to see films showing performances, such as we see at a concert or in a theatre. Also we would like to see films that are not performances but honest learning sessions, such as the rehearsals for the concert or the play that will later be given. Films for teachers should show not only the right thing but also, occasionally, the wrong thing, plainly labelled as such. They should be good enough to be seen not only once but many times. In all such films, what the students say should be fully and amply recorded. Great care must be exercised in the editing of such films lest the honest documentation of what goes on in a classroom be tampered with and falsified. The essence of good language teaching is to be first model, then interlocutor, then coach or guide. Films for teachers should show the teacher as all three.

My final plea would be that we not write down to, or talk down to teachers, that we not condescend, nor oversimplify, as if teachers were stationed intellectually somewhere between their pupils and the rest of the academic world. This has been the tone, the expectation, the practice in all too many books and materials prepared for teachers. For every teacher that I know who wants to be intellectually coddled and carried along "Taddy, like you done through the toy fair" (as Finnegan said), there are, at the least, ten others who welcome the challange of new concepts and new practices and whose arms are long enough to reach for a dictionary.